

# Cherry Blossom Trail Guide



Trails Forever

## Ancient Traditions

The significance of the cherry blossoms begins prior to the 8th century A.D., when the Japanese celebrated the fertility of the earth with prayers under the blossoms. The cherry blossoms, called “sakura,” appear in paintings and poetry more often than any other image aside from the moon and Mount Fuji. Currently, the Japanese celebrate the blossoms with “hanami.” Literally meaning “flower viewing,” the term refers almost exclusively to viewing cherry blossoms. According to the traditions of hanami, the blossoms remain the most appreciated when seen near reflective bodies of water. As a result, the cherry trees fittingly stand throughout the park along the Potomac River and around the Tidal Basin. When an ancient temple appears within the scene, the temple and the blossoms generally compliment one another. Thus, the National Mall and Memorial Parks affords panoramas of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial framed by blossoms, in accord with the best traditions of hanami.



Yo no naka wa

Mikka minu ma ni

Sakura kana\*

\*(life is short, like the three-day glory of the cherry blossom)

# Welcome to the National Mall and Memorial Parks!



Nothing heralds the arrival of spring in the Nation’s Capital as the blooming of the Japanese Cherry trees, gifts from Japan in 1912. Millions of people gather in Washington, D.C. every year to see the dramatic blossoms and participate in a myriad of events. In order to optimize your cherry viewing experience, we have created this easy-to-use walking guide outlining three routes, all full of natural and cultural treasures for you to experience. Park Rangers are on hand at various locations in the park should you need assistance.

Be sure to join a Park Ranger for some of the many interpretive programs going on throughout the park! Also, during the annual two weeks of the National Cherry Blossom Festival enjoy city-wide cultural performances, art and crafts demonstrations and much more.

On behalf of the Superintendent of National Mall and Memorial Parks, have a fun and safe viewing experience!

*Cherry Blossoms, Cherry Blossoms. Across March skies. As far as you can see, Mists or clouds? Their fragrance is floating. Let us go, let us go. It's a must to see!*  
- from traditional Japanese folk song, “Sakura, sakura.”

Mrs. Eliza Scidmore makes first request to Public Building and Grounds to have Japanese Cherry trees planted on newly reclaimed Potomac Waterfront. These requests continue for the next 24 years.

Dr. Fairchild holds Arbor Day observance, giving cherry saplings to D.C. school boys. Mrs. Scidmore attends and expresses interest in planting trees in the park. Dr. Fairchild embraces her idea, and they begin working together.

Trees arrive in Washington. USDA finds trees unacceptable due to diseases and order they be burned. Dr. Takamine offers another gift of 3,020 trees.

Workmen continue planting trees around Tidal Basin and East Potomac Park.

The first Cherry Blossom Festival is held and becomes an annual event in subsequent years.

Dec. 11, four cherry trees cut down in what is assumed to be in retaliation for the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The referred to as “Oriental” Flowering Cherries throughout the rest of the war.

1885

1906

1908

1909

1910

1912

1913-1920

1927

1935

1938

1941

1948

USDA official Dr. David Fairchild imports and plants 100 Japanese Cherry trees on his land in Chevy Chase, MD to test their hardiness.

Mrs. Scidmore and Fairchild seek support from First Lady Taft and offer to donate the trees. Plan gets attention of visiting Japanese dignitary Dr. Jokichi Takamine who offers donation of 2,000 trees in the name of Tokyo. She accepts, and the international gift giving cycle begins.

3,020 healthy trees safely arrive in D.C. First Lady Taft and Viscountess Chinda plant first two trees in small ceremony.

Washington school children re-enact original planting ceremony.

A group of women chain themselves to the beloved cherry trees in an effort to save them from being destroyed during construction of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial.

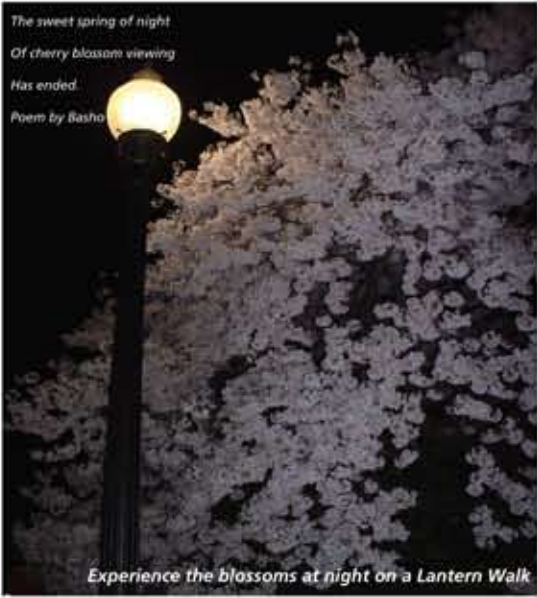
Princesses are selected from every State in hopes of becoming the Cherry Blossom Queen to reign during festival.

## Blossoming Gifts

For nearly a century, the beauty of the blossoming cherry trees has enchanted visitors on the National Mall and Memorial Parks.

Gifts from Japan in 1912, the 3,020 cherry trees arrived in the United States as living symbols of friendship between the two nations. In a formal ceremony, First Lady Helen Harron Taft and the Viscountess Chinda, wife of the Japanese Ambassador, planted the first cherry trees along the Tidal Basin. Washington, D.C. residents quickly embraced the trees and, by 1935, established the Cherry Blossom Festival as an annual event.

The cherry trees are a particularly fitting element of the National Mall and Memorial Parks. Just as monuments and memorials represent universal ideals of unity, equality, and freedom, the cherry trees also represent universal ideas. They serve as symbols of the beauty and brevity of life; therein lays the inherent equality of our shared mortality. This fundamental concept crosses all borders and represents a common truth among humankind. The deep appreciation felt for the cherry blossoms testifies to this universality of the human mind and spirit.



The sweet spring of night  
Of cherry blossom viewing  
Has ended.  
Poem by Basho

Experience the blossoms at night on a Lantern Walk

### Masa's Fable

How did cherry blossoms get their pink color? The following tale from Japanese folklore is one of many legends that explain how cherry blossoms became pink.

Long ago there lived a beautiful girl named Masa. In the spring, when the cherry blossoms were in bloom, two knights fell in love with her. One knight was the gallant Makito; the other was the villainous Kurondo. Masa spurned the villain Kurondo and fell in love with Makito. Kurondo, though, would not accept Masa's decision. He discovered that Masa's father had an alliance with rebel leaders. The evil Kurondo used this information to blackmail Masa's father. Kurondo forced Masa's father to order her to give Makito drugged wine. Kurondo would then slay the incapacitated Makito and take Masa for his wife. Masa could not bring herself to betray her beloved Makito, but neither could she disobey her father. Masa devised a plan of her own to save Makito and preserve her family honor. Masa disguised herself as Makito then went to the arranged ambush site beneath a blossoming cherry tree. There she drank the drugged wine herself and fell asleep. Kurondo, finding what appeared to be a helpless Makito, drew his sword and put the unconscious Masa to death. The following year, the cherry tree beneath which Masa had sacrificed herself, and which had only borne white flowers in the past, bloomed with pink blossoms.

—Haiku—

Formerly known as “Hokku,” this style of traditional Japanese poetry usually expresses a moment, sensation or impression of a particular aspect of nature. A haiku poet (haijin) writes about a moment in time and a brief experience. Cherry blossom viewing traditionally includes writing poetry. It is no wonder the short lived cherry blossoms appear in countless haiku! These poems consist of three lines. The first and third lines consist of 5 syllables. The second line has 7. There are also two, more modern ways to compose haiku. One is by using a metric system instead of syllables and the other is by reading the entire haiku in one breath. Adhering to the 5-7-5 pattern, see if you can compose a haiku about your experience in the park.

Example:

I saw the blossoms  
The city takes a deep breath  
Must they go away?

## “When will the cherry trees bloom?”

Unfortunately, this isn't the easiest question to answer. It is nearly impossible to give an accurate forecast more than 10 days before the peak bloom. It is no wonder that given the brevity of the blossoms, people want to catch them at the height of their beauty, or peak bloom. The **Peak Bloom Date** is when 70 percent of the blossoms of the Yoshino Cherry trees are open. This date varies from year to year, depending on weather conditions, which has resulted in blooms as early as March 15 (1990) and as late as April 18 (1958). Cherry Blossom Festival dates are set based on the average date of blooming (April 4). The **Blooming Period** starts several days before the Peak Bloom Date and can last as long as 14 days; however, frost or high temperatures combined with wind and/or rain can shorten this period.

In order to make any kind of prediction, National Park Service Horticulturists must closely monitor the 5 stages of bud development. For the latest update visit: [www.nps.gov/cherry](http://www.nps.gov/cherry).

### Stage 1

The green color in the buds begin to appear in late February to early March

### Stage 2

When the florets become visible in March, there is an average 16-21 days to peak bloom

### Stage 3

The extension of the florets indicates an average of 12-17 days to peak bloom

### Stage 4

Peduncle elongation, the lengthening of flower's stalk, is frost critical. This stage indicates an average 6-10 days to peak bloom.

### Stage 5

When the puffy white flowers begin to emerge, there is an average of 4-6 days to peak bloom